



National Disabled Veterans

Winter Sports Clinic

Skier Profile

Buddy Hayes—Differently-Abled

Buddy Hayes, a 48-year-old Army veteran from Chesapeake, Va., is not fond of the word *disabled*. “What positive word do you know in the English language that begins with ‘dis’?” she asks. “I consider myself differently-abled, not disabled; nobody is going to dis me!” Although she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) almost four years ago, Hayes has an infectiously enthusiastic spirit and has made it her mission to help those less fortunate.

Having come from a military family, Hayes and her twin sister joined the Army in 1977 when they were just 18 years old. Hayes served from 1977-1979 as a heavy equipment operator in Fort Leonardwood, Mo. She graduated from her heavy equipment training class among 600 men, being the first woman to complete this type of program.

Upon discharge from the Army, Hayes worked as a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) for 15 years, a position, she now says, that prepared her for her own future disability. When the demands of her position as a CTRS became too great, Hayes changed careers and began working as a pre-school special education teacher. Then, in 2002, Hayes became ill and spent an extensive amount time in the hospital. She was eventually diagnosed a few months later with MS. According to Hayes, “I went from being fully functioning to not functioning at all.”

Hayes spent the next few months in hospitals and nursing homes. Eventually, she recovered enough to leave the nursing home and, just one month later, was dared by her recreation therapist to try a one-mile wheelchair race. “When I showed up for my first race, I thought I could never make it,” she said. “I was the only wheelchair racer in the entire competition, but once I finished, I was hooked on the thrill of competition.”

Since her first race, Hayes has competed in multiple charitable competitions including the Rock N’ Roll half marathon, the Disney half marathon, the Disney full marathon and the Shamrock marathon, all in which she took first place and raised more than \$15,000 for leukemia lymphoma. “I don’t race to win,” Hayes says. “I race to stay healthy. I may not be able to come up with cures for these awful diseases, but I’m able to wheel my wheelchair to do my part.”

Furthermore, Hayes has also entered the Miss Wheelchair Virginia Pageant for the second consecutive year in which her platform is “sports and recreation for everyone.” She says, “I am really not the tiara type, but if it means getting the word out, then I’m all about it!” The winner of the competition will become the spokesperson for persons with disabilities for the state of Virginia.

This year will mark Hayes’ second trip to the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. “I had a blast at last year’s Clinic and I know I will have so much fun at this one, too,” she said. Since last April, Hayes has taken up skiing on her own. “I attended Visa’s Adapted Ski Festival in Canada as the first American veteran to participate. “I got lots of skiing time in and I’ve improved my skills.” Besides enjoying the athletic and physical aspects of the Clinic, Hayes believes that events such as this help boost self-esteem. “I have a naturally upbeat and positive spirit, but not everyone is like me. Activities like the Clinic empower people. Taking a huge step like this helps people take much bigger steps in their lives outside athletics.” Buddy Hayes is one shining example.

Miracles on a Mountainside!



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